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Op-Ed: The Army Should Embrace A2/AD

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The U.S. Army is contemplating mission sets that it will perform in the middle of the second decade of the 21st century. After 10 years of two ground wars, the Army seeks to redefine its activities. While other actors seek to relegate ground forces into irrelevance, the Army seeks to communicate why it remains necessary.

At the outset of his administration, President Barack Obama made a strategic decision to increase focus on the Asia-Pacific region and rebalance U.S. engagements, activities, and resources toward and within this vital region. The President's approach is grounded in a simple proposition: the United States is historically a Pacific power whose people, economy, strength, and interests are increasingly and inextricably linked with Asia's economic, security, and political development.

Recently, General Raymond Odierno, General James Amos, and Admiral William McRaven published a White Paper entitled *Strategic Landpower; Winning the Clash of Wills*.¹ In it, they state that:

The rise of powerful regional competitors with the ability to challenge us militarily, particularly in East Asia, will pose a national and international security challenge. Asymmetric anti-access capabilities, such as advanced anti-ship cruise missiles, anti-satellite weapons, and cyber warfare will challenge the United States' ability to safeguard and guarantee access to the global commons.

Although anti-access capabilities provide a challenge to the United States, these capabilities may also provide the United States the opportunity to manage the rise of powerful regional

competitors by limiting attempts to deny access to the global commons. Current Department of Defense strategic guidance directs U.S. forces to maintain the “ability to project power in areas in which our access and freedom to operate are challenged” and to be “capable of deterring and defeating aggression by any potential adversary.”² The Joint Operational Access Concept defines anti-access as “those actions and capabilities, usually long-range, designed to prevent an opposing force from entering an operational area,” while area denial “refers to those actions and capabilities, usually of shorter range, designed not to keep an opposing force out, but to limit its freedom of action within the operational area.”³ Together these documents point to why the United States needs to be able to access areas to deter and defeat aggression. The U.S. Army should seek to participate in the anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) mission set by adopting land-based A2/AD capabilities, which would strengthen the position of the United States when dealing with potential adversaries in Asia and the Middle East.

As the U.S. Army conducts contingency planning for security scenarios in the western Pacific, it might be beneficial for the planners to conceptualize the Asia-Pacific region not as a predominantly large ocean expanse, but as a region that has vast tracts of land surrounded by water. The area that comprises what the Chinese call the “first island chain” of East Asia consists of Japan and the Philippines. The island chain is bounded in the north by the Republic of Korea and in the southwest by Vietnam. These four countries comprise 365 million people and over 1.1 million square kilometers (km) of land mass. Together, they would make the third largest country in the world by population (ahead of the United States) and the 26th largest by land mass (between Colombia and South Africa). Consequently, the “first island chain” is home for a substantial number of people, in addition to a large land mass, who would be able to deter and defeat aggression against their nations with assistance from the U.S. Army. This area also provides the Army the ability to provide a stabilizing presence. As a bonus, this mission set helps Korea, Japan, and the Philippines, who are all Major Non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization Allies (MNNAs), have strong ties with the U.S. Army.

The U.S. “pivot” or “rebalance” to the Pacific is driven by the rise of China. The U.S. Navy and Air Force have conceptualized “AirSea Battle” as their approach to operations in the region.⁴ According to the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis:

Both (Navy and Air Force) service chiefs are committed to pursuing a new US operational concept called AirSea Battle which appears designed to assess how US power-projection capabilities can be preserved in the face of the military challenges posed by China and Iran.⁵

According to this AirSea doctrine, the U.S. Navy and Air Force appear to want to challenge the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. However, there seems to be little reason to go toe-to-toe with the Chinese in either of those bodies of water: Is there a driving need to enter these littoral areas? T. X. Hammes discussed this issue in his Institute for National Strategic Studies Strategic Forum Paper, "Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict," and determined that there is no need to enter the first island chain and attack China itself in the event of conflict:

Operationally, Offshore Control uses currently available but limited means and restricted ways to enforce a distant blockade on China. It establishes a set of concentric rings that denies China the use of the sea inside the first island chain, defends the sea and air space of the first island chain and dominates the air and maritime space outside the island chain.⁶

The U.S. Army could play a very important role in Offshore Control by joining the U.S. Navy and U.S. Air Force in forming a sea-, air-, and land-based triad of A2/AD capabilities. Together, the three services could weave a web that may prevent the Chinese from taking control of the South and East China Seas.

The U.S. Navy and Air Force have well-developed capabilities designed to combat the forces of other countries. Of particular interest is the state of anti-ship capabilities. The Department of Defense is currently using the Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM) and is working toward the Extended Range version (JASSM-ER) while the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA) develops the Long Range Anti Ship Missile (LRASM), which will have a range of over 550 miles.⁷ These missiles are designed to be launched from both air and ship platforms. This author suggests that DARPA should expand the projected use of the LRASM to include a ground-launched version. Just as the United States deployed Ground Launched Cruise Missiles in the 1980s and 1990s, a ground launched anti-ship missile would provide a triad of launch capabilities. Placing anti-ship missiles on C-130 transportable truck platforms, much like the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HiMARS), would make the LRASM a much more flexible and formidable threat. The JASSM is currently configured to be launched from aircraft or ships, Chinese defensive systems will most likely be able to detect the aircraft or ships that will be used as launch platforms. Conversely, truck-mounted systems could be deployed anywhere along a coastline, be able to launch their missiles, and then move out of the area to avoid a Chinese counterattack.

From selected areas along the coasts of South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Vietnam, U.S. anti-ship missiles would be able to range the entirety of the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The distance from Korea to the North Sea Fleet headquarters and anchorage at Qingdao is a little over 300 km. From the Korean Island of Cheju-do it is a little more than 400 km to Shanghai and the Yangtze Channel where the Chinese East Sea Fleet is anchored. It is over 600 km from Okinawa to Shanghai. It is a little over 800 km from the northwestern Philippines to the mouth of the Pearl River Channel. From the western Philippines, it is little over 1,200 km across the South China Sea to Nha Trang in Vietnam, or a 600 km shot from either side. From Vietnamese locations, it is less than 300 km to the Sanya submarine base on Hainan Island. Although the South Sea Fleet is masked by the body of Hainan Island, once they would sortie out and pass the small islands north of Hainan, they can be ranged by both Vietnam (a little over 500 km) and the western Philippines (less than 1000 km). That means that fires from regional MNAs can range every major Chinese naval presence and can dominate both the East China Sea and the South China Sea. This author asks why would the United States potentially sacrifice large numbers of U.S. Navy and Air Force personnel and weapons platforms in close combat with the PLAN and the PLAAF in the East and South China Seas when the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force can collaborate to prevent the Chinese from deploying out of their harbors?

This type of proposed U.S. Army anti-shipping capability would also be useful for helping to defend Taiwan in case of Chinese invasion. These platforms would be able to attack targets on the north and south sides of Taiwan from Japan and the Philippines. That would leave the very competent Taiwanese armed forces to use their own systems such as the Hsiung Feng series anti-ship missiles to defend the island against Chinese naval forces that made it through the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force gauntlet; while U.S. forces never enter the East China Sea.

This proposed capability would also afford the U.S. Army an opportunity to provide security force assistance to our allies in Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. The Army could deploy training teams to those countries and teach them how to perform the mission set and also to perform bi- and multinational defense of sovereignty exercises. By providing these nations with their own anti-ship missile capability, their ability to defend their own sovereignty would be significantly enhanced. The presence of U.S. ground forces visiting these islands would also help to convince these countries that they can depend on the United States to help defend them in times of crisis. Additionally, U.S. manufacturers could sell land-based systems to these countries.

There are those who oppose the U.S. Army adopting an anti-ship missile mission set. For

example, some feel that no country in the region will side with the United States against China unless the United States will guarantee its protection, because the Chinese would quickly destroy its economy. Thus, countries would be interested in capabilities such as theater missile defense but not surface-to-surface systems. Another example is that in every exercise based on these scenarios, the Chinese fleet was destroyed by the U.S. Navy and Air Force before it could become a threat to any key land areas. A third example is that in a time of budget cuts, some say that the Army should spend its limited dollars on things other than attacking ships. Each of these examples has a certain validity, however, this mission set reassures allies that the United States will stand by them if China threatens; lessens the exposure of U.S. Navy and Air Force launch platforms to Chinese A2/AD capabilities; and, directs a modicum of U.S. Army funding toward missions that are outlined in U.S. strategic documents and doctrine. This mission set would also prove to be useful in other areas of the world where our potential adversaries can be countered by U.S. A2/AD capabilities, such as the Arabian Gulf/Straits of Hormuz and the Straits of Malacca.

The U.S. Army historically embraced this mission as coastal defense. Starting in the early days of the Republic, the Army had the responsibility for defending the long east coast of the United States, most particularly against the British. The Army established coastal artillery as a branch in 1794 and maintained that capability until 1950 when it was deemed no longer necessary. Perhaps it is time to think about re-embracing that traditional mission.

ENDNOTES

1. General Raymond Odierno, General James Amos, and Admiral William McRaven, *Strategic Landpower; Winning the Clash of Wills*, Washington, DC, p. 5, available from www.arcic.army.mil/app_Documents/Strategic-Landpower-White-Paper-06MAY2013.pdf.

2. *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2012, p. 4, available from www.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf.

3. *Joint Operational Access Concept*, Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 17, 2013, p. i.

4. General Norton A. Schwartz, USAF, and Admiral Jonathan W. Greenert, USN, "Air-Sea Battle—Promoting Stability in an Era of Uncertainty," *The American Interest*, February 20, 2012, available from www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1212.

5. *Why AirSea Battle*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Analysis, p. ix, available from www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20100219.Why_AirSea_Battle/R.20100219.Why_AirSea_Battle.pdf.

6. T. X. Hammes, *Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict*, Washington, DC: Institute for National and Strategic Studies, p. 4, available from www.ndu.edu/inss/docuploaded/SF%20278%20Hammes.pdf.

7. See www.defenseindustrydaily.com/LRASM-Missiles-Reaching-for-a-Long-Reach-Punch-06752.

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